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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000502

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE

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SUBJECT: ALBANIA PRESSES FOR KOSOVO RECOGNITION AT ISLAMIC
CONFERENCE SUMMIT

Classified By: CDA Judith Cefkin for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The GOA unsuccessfully lobbied the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to recognize Kosovo's independence at the group's June 16 to 18 meeting of foreign ministers in Kampala. The GOA believes that several OIC countries are likely to recognize Kosovo over the next several months. However, according to a senior Albanian MFA official, most OIC members remain unconvinced of the merits of recognizing Kosovo or are reluctant to establish a principle of self-determination that could be seized upon by their own restive minorities. The GOA believes slow, patient diplomacy will be required for additional OIC member states to recognize Kosovo's independence. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Econoff met with Islam Lauka, Director of Multilateral Affairs at the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on June 24. Lauka, who attended the June meeting of the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers in Kampala with Foreign Minister Basha, said lobbying the OIC to formally recognize Kosovo's February 17 declaration of independence was the main purpose behind the GOA's participation in the summit. The MFA official said Basha encouraged the OIC to recognize Kosovo's independence in a speech during the plenary session and in several bilateral meetings. Basha pushed for the group's foreign ministers to recognize Kosovo in the summit declaration. He also spoke approvingly of the recent adoption of Kosovo's new constitution and described in detail the guidelines to reconfigure the UNMIK mission in Kosovo promoted by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. The Albanians' objective was to convince the OIC to adopt a declaration recognizing Kosovo or at least taking notice of important recent developments and provide support through a declaration of solidarity and a pledge for development assistance.

¶3. (C) Basha was unsuccessful in his lobbying efforts. Lauka said Algeria and Tunisia objected on the grounds that the GOA's declaration would contravene a resolution regarding Kosovo adopted by heads of state at the March 13 OIC summit in Dakar. The Algerians and Tunisians argued that the Kampala ministerial conference, attended by lower ranking officials, should not overturn the declaration of OIC heads of state that only took notice of Kosovo's independence declaration. However, Lauka said this was a smokescreen for the majority of OIC members who were not prepared to recognize Kosovo's independence. The MFA official said this group included, in addition to Algeria and Tunisia, Egypt, Iran, Syria, Sudan and Indonesia. With the exception of Indonesia, Lauka said these countries all openly spoke against the GOA's resolution. (Note: Lauka said the Indonesian delegation privately was sympathetic to the Kosovar issue, but would not recognize Pristina due to problems with its own internal separatist movements.)

¶4. (C) Lauka affirmed that many OIC officials did not understand Kosovo's unique historical circumstances and confused its situation with secessionist movements in other regions. The Albanian said a "provincial viewpoint" dominated this thinking, especially with officials from countries with restive minority populations. He said the GOA

argued that Kosovo was different from these conflicts and was not a case of separation or a question of self-determination.

Instead, the Albanians contended that Kosovar independence was the final stage of the violent, non-consensual dissolution of Yugoslavia. Lauka said the GOA negotiating strategy rejected arguments based on self-determination since these opened the door to other messy and controversial regional conflicts. The MFA official also said the OIC was institutionally hampered in its approach to Kosovo due to its long-standing links to non-aligned movements that stressed respect for states' national sovereignty. Lauka said relations with Serbia played a role in the foreign ministers' deliberations and that the Russians, who enjoy observer status at the OIC, were effective in lobbying against the GOA proposal.

15. (C) Lauka said Saudi Arabia and the remaining Gulf states were prepared in principle to recognize Kosovo. However, the Saudi delegate said the timing was not yet right for recognition. The Saudis and the other Gulf states reportedly promised to recognize Kosovo in the near term, presumably within the next six months or so. Lauka predicted that seven to ten OIC members would recognize Kosovo in the coming months, likely including Pakistan, Malaysia and Azerbaijan, all of which were supportive of Kosovar independence. Turkey, which has already recognized Kosovo, was an influential Kosovo supporter behind the scenes at the conference. However, the OIC's decision-making process is consensual and the firm opposition of prominent members such as Egypt and Iran derailed the Albanians' efforts to garner OIC recognition or a lesser declaration of support for Kosovo.

16. (C) Comment: The GOA is at a disadvantage in lobbying OIC countries due to Albania's strong secular traditions. (Note: Over the years there have been sporadic suggestions within the Albanian establishment that the country had little in common with the group and should withdraw. The Embassy has consistently encouraged the GOA's continued participation in the OIC as an example of political moderation.) Nonetheless, the Albanians' approach in lobbying OIC countries was forceful and strategic in its formulation of presenting Kosovo independence as separate and distinct from other divisive regional conflicts. Lauka indicated that convincing a majority of the 57-member organization to recognize Kosovo would require patient, coordinated diplomacy. On a lighter note, the Albanian MFA has provided the new government in Pristina with a building for the Kosovar embassy in Tirana - conveniently located between the Serbian and Russian embassies. End Comment.

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